

THE
UNPARDONABLE SIN
AGAINST THE
HOLY GHOST.
OR, THE
SIN UNTO DEATH.

BRIEFLY DISCOURSED OF

- I. Proving what that Sin is.
- II. That all other Sins how great and heinous soever, may be forgiven unto men; but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven, neither in this World, nor in the World to come.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

Some INSTRUCTIONS, how a Man may walk,
and not commit this unpardonable Sin.

By the Rev. Mr. THOMAS HALYBURTON,
Professor of Divinity in the University of St. Andrews.

Entered in Stationers Hall according to Act of Parliament.

EDINBURGH.

Printed in the Year, MDCCLXXV.

[PRICE TWO PENCE.]

Of the Unpardonable SIN
AGAINST THE
H O L Y G H O S T.

Mat. xiii. 32. *And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world neither in the world to come.*

THERE is no mere Man since the Fall, that can live without Sin for all are Sinners. But yet there are some Degrees of Sins; some Sins in their own Nature are small, others are more great, yet pardonable; and one Sin there is unpardonable, and whosoever commits that one Sin, shall have no Forgiveness, but must for ever bear the Weight and Punishment both of that and of all his other Sins: There is such a Sin as St. Matth. speaks of here in my Text, that it is a *Sin unto Death*. And now I come to the Explication of the Words, from whence I shall rise this Point of Doctrine.

Doctr. That amongst all the sins committed by fallen Mankind, there is only one Sin that is a *Sin unto Death*; and whosoever committeth that, he hath no forgiveness, neither in this World, nor in the World to come.

Now



Now for my further proceeding on this Subject.
I shall lay open to you,

First, What the Sin unto Death is.

2dly, That all our Sins, so great and heinous soever may be forgiven.

3dly, That this Sin alone shall never be forgiven.

4thly, The Reason why that Sin alone is unpardonable. And then,

Lastly I shall conclude with a few Words of Application.

I shall begin, First, with the description of this unpardonable Sin, where I shall endeavour to make as plain a Description of it as possible I can; and doing of it, I shall, (1) Shew you negatively what is not this Sin. (2) I shall shew you positively what it is.

1. It is not every quenching of the Motions of the Spirit, that is that Sin. It is true, when the Holy Ghost comes with a still voice, and knocks at the Doors of Sinners Hearts for entrance, be often comes and strives with them, and secretly wooes and beseeches them to leave their Sins, and be converted; yet they quench and stifle all his motions and bear up their Hearts against him, and will not be obedient to his heavenly Calls. Now, such sin grievously against the Holy Ghost. But yet this alone is not the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost; for Men who have stood it out a long Time, and have often quenched, grieved the Holy Spirit, yet at last they have been wrought upon into sincere Conversion.

2. Man may commit many heinous and crying Sins, and yet not be guilty of the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost; a Man may be an Idolater, a Whoremonger, a Fornicator, a Murderer, and work Witchcraft, and Sin with a very high Hand; nay he may live in all Manner Filthiness and Lawdness, and yet not be under the Guilt of the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost. Thus we read 2 Chron.

iii. That Manaſſes ſinned with a very high Hand; he was an idolater, an Inchanter, and worked Witchcraft and dealt with familiar Spirits, and wrought much Evil in the Sight of the Lord. And Mary Magdalane had ſeven Devils caſt out of her, Luke viii. 2. and yet both were pardoned,

3. A Man may ſin preſumptuouſly againſt great Light and Knowledge, and yet not commit this Sin unto Death; For Peter, when he denied Chriſt, he did it againſt great Knowledge of Chriſt he knew Chriſt to be his Lord and Saviour, he was one of Chriſt's beloved Diſciples, and for all that how ſtrongly denied he Chriſt and that with an oath too? And yet for all that, Chriſt looked upon him with a merciful Eye, and he repented, and was forgiven.

4. It is not very malicious Sin that is the unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; for St. Paul had certainly great Malice in his heart, when he went on ſo furiously to preſecute the Church of God, and yet was converted, became a Preacher of the Goſpel of Chriſt, which before he perſecuted.

5. And laſtly. It is not final Unbelief, nor final Impenitence, that is the unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; tho' ſome be of Opinion that it is becauſe that Sin is unpardonable; and Chriſt himſelf hath ſaid Matth. xii. 31. That all manner of Sin and Blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men, except it be the Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. But you are to take the Words of our Saviour in their true ſenſe and Meaning; it is all Manner of Sin and Blaſphemy committed within the Compaſs of a Man's Life that ſhall be forgiven, except the Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; for Sin of final Impenitency and final Unbelief is not complicated until the very Moment of a Man's Death; and then you all know that there is no repentance; and conſequently no Pardon after Death, for Chriſt ſaith he that ſinneth againſt the Holy Ghoſt, hath no Pardon, neither in this World, nor in the World

to come. Now, why should Christ say, *In the World*, if there be no space to be forgiven in this World? But a Man may commit the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost, even many Years before his Death. Besides, there are many Thousands that die in Impenitence and Unbelief, and are damned, and yet never committed the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost.

Thus I have shewed you negatively, what is not this unpardonable Sin; none of these Sins in particular is that Sin.

I come now to shew you positively what this Sin *unto Death is*, and wherein this unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost doth consist. Now there are several Opinions in the World about it, some hold one Thing, some another. But I have no Time nor Room to dispute concerning others Opinions about it; But I will endeavour, thro' God's help to lead you to the plain Sight of it by the Light of the holy Scriptures.

Now in the First Place, you must know, that there are two Sorts of People that cannot commit this unpardonable Sin.

1. The true Believer cannot commit it; the many Times for their Trial, God suffers them to fall foully into many gross Sins; yet they being rooted in Christ are upheld by free Grace and Mercy, that they cannot fall into this unpardonable Sin.

2. The grossly Ignorant cannot commit it because it is a Sin against great Light and Knowledge. Indeed the greater part of the World shall be damned, yet among the greater Part, there are but few of them that can commit that unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost.

Some have both Light and Grace, these shall not commit that unpardonable Sin. Again some have neither Light nor Grace, these cannot commit it. But there are some again that have Light and not Grace, these are they that are liable to commit that

unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost. Now, there must be two ingredients to make up this unpardonable Sin; that is, Light in the Head, and Malice in the Heart without these two, the Sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be committed; for to sin against great light and knowledge is not that sin alone; nor yet to sin ignorantly, out of that malice, is not that sin; but they must join both together, to make up this unpardonable sin. Thus we see by the example of St. Peter and St. Paul; Peter he denied Christ, and forswore him too, and that grievously, against light and knowledge; for he knew Christ to be the only begotten Son of God and he knew God in him, and was one of Christ's disciples, and one of his beloved ones too, he was taught of Christ, & had experimental knowledge of his love and favour, and yet he wickedly with an oath denied him. Now if Peter had done this out of malice and spight, then he had committed that sin unto death, for which there is no forgiveness; but Peter had no malice in his heart all this while, even when he denied Christ, as you may see, Mat. xxvii. When Christ told him, *Before the Cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice*; he answered, *If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee*. And then denying him thro' infirmity and weakness of the flesh, when he considered what he had done, *He went out and wept bitterly*, ver. 25. St. Paul he had great malice and spight against the people of God as you may see, acts ix. 1. Now, here was a great rage and malice in Saul against the ways of the people of God, but doing it ignorantly, he at last heard a voice, saying, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* and receiving a light from Heaven, that it was Jesus that he persecuted, he was pricked to the heart, and trembling astonished, said *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Now by these two places of scripture you may plainly see, that Peter sinned against great light, and Paul out of malice yet none of them both committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; but whensoever light and malice meet together.

gether in one man, then there is a sin against the Holy Ghost. Now, as all other sins, so this sin against the Holy Ghost may be committed in thought, word and deed.

In thought, that is when a wicked Man against his clear Light and knowledge, doth but conceive a malicious Thought or Purpose towards persecuting the Gospel of Christ, or of the Saints of Christ, to hinder the Work of the Holy Ghost in them.

This Sin is thought to be the Sin of the lost Angels; for which cause they were lost without all Hopes of Pardon. Now some dispute whether their sin was a sin of the thoughts: But, I say, with all likelihood, it was, for the Angels being only spirits without Bodies, and so have no Use of bodily Tongues, it could not be committed in words, nor yet could they commit it in Action, because they were cast out of Heaven before they could bring it into Practice, therefore it must be a Sin of the Thought.

Now, their Sin was this, their Habitation being in the brightest Heavens, next under God himself, they had exceeding great Light and knowledge, they had more Knowledge, than all the Men in the World ever had, and were happy above all other Creatures; but when not being contented with this Estate, they thought to be as high as God himself, therefore maliciously sought to make War against the Son of God, and put him out of his Throne; for which Cause they were immediately thrust out of Heaven, never more to see the Face of mercy. Thus their Sin being of the same Nature with the Sin against the Holy Ghost, they were excluded all Hopes of Pardon.

2. This Sin may be committed in words too, that is, when a Man speaks blasphemously and maliciously of Christ and his holy Ways: This was the Sin of the Scribes and Pharisees, Mark iii. 27. Therefore Christ saith unto them, as in Ver. 28. and 29.

Now the reason of this speech of our blessed Saviour,

our, is shewed in V. 20 Because he said they had an unclean spirit; which plainly shews, that these Scribes and Pharisees hath spoken Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. These Scribes were great learned Men, and they could know no other but that Christ was the Son of God, and they knew, that he cast out Devils, by the Spirit of God, and yet out of spite to Christ, maliciously and blasphemously said, that he cast out Devils by Beelzebub, the Chief of Devils. Thus these Scribes committed the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost, and that in Word.

3. This Sin may be committed in action too; that is, when a Man being once thoroughly enlightned, and entered into a holy Course of Life, and tasted of the comforts of the Spirit, and had some foretaste of the Joys of Heaven, and not only makes a Profession of the Gospel but teaches it to others; he at last takes a Dislike of these holy Courses, and through Spight and Malice utterly forsakes, opposes and persecutes these good Ways of God, which he before profest and taught. But to sum up this Point, this unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost is fully describ'd by the Apostle to the Hebrews, Chap. x. 27. 28. 29 likewise Heb. vi. 5, 6.

Now the Sin against the Holy Ghost is briefly this: *It is a wilful and malicious opposing of the known Truth, joined with final Apostacy.*

This Sin unto Death, is an opposing sin: Now, to oppose a thing is to contradict it, or gainsay it; when a Man says a thing is so and so, he denies it, and says, It is not so; when a thing must be done he says again, It must not, nor shall not be done: But a man may be an opposing Man, and yet cannot commit this Sin. Therefore,

1. It is a truth he must oppose; that is, he must utterly oppose and reject Christ, who said, *I am the Truth*, John xiv. 6. He opposeth all his Threatnings, and will not believe his Promises, and counts him to be

be a Seducer of the People and counts the Blood of the Covenant to be an unholy thing; Nay, he also opposes the Spirit of Christ; who is the Spirit of truth: so that he will not obey his Motions, and will not be led or guided by him; but a Man may oppose the truth and yet do ignorantly. Therefore,

2. It must be known truth that he opposeth he must be once enlightned: but you must know, that it is not only a notional Knowledge, and human Learning he may know much of God, and of his will in the Letter of the word, and yet not capable of committing this unpardonable sin; but he must be so far enlightned as to see the evil that is in sin, and the excellency of Christ he must taste of the heavenly gift, and be made partaker of the Holy Ghost, and taste of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and by the blood of the covenant, which he counts an unholy Thing, he is in part sanctified, and cleansed from many sins; he must have sweet communion with God in his word and sacraments; he must have some taste of the love and favour of God, and comforts of his spirit, and be refreshed by it; and taste of the joys of heaven, and have some foretast of the happiness of the world to come.

4. He must oppose the known truth wilfully, he must wilfully fall away after he hath received the knowledge of the truth; other sins are committed thro' infirmity, the will is chief actor in it. And to compleat and make up this unpardonable sin there is,

5. Malice in the heart: Without this, this sin cannot be committed; it must be a malicious opposing of the known truth.

Now a man having gone this far, he comes in the last place to be an apostate: Now, for such a one, wilfully, spitefully and maliciously to fall away, he so falls as never to rise more. It is true, the children of God fall, and that often, and yet rise again: But then they fall through weakness or infirmity, and not wilfully

fully and maliciously : But these wicked wretches fall wilfully and maliciously, and so fall finally. Against such, the door of mercy is ever shut. Concerning such St Peter speaketh, 2 Pet. ii. 21, 22. There is such another dreadful place of Scripture against these apostates, that is, Heb. x. 26.

Object. But what is the Reason then that this Sin cannot be forgiven?

Ans. The reason arises from the nature of this sin ; for this sin by whomsoever it is committed, hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, so that there is no place for repentance to be wrought, neither for that nor any other sin. This sin is called a sin against the Holy Ghost because it is a sin against the person of the Holy Ghost ; so is all sin against his person ; but it is called a sin against the Holy Ghost because it is against the office and work of the Holy Ghost. Now, every one of the three persons have their particular work : the work of the Father is to create ; the work of the Son to redeem lost sinners ; and the Holy Ghost is to enlighten, convince sanctify, and convert them. Now, a man committing this unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, reject all this work of the Spirit. Now for a man to be thoroughly enlightened by the Holy Ghost, that he comes to know the evil of sin, and of his lost and undone condition without Christ, & that none but the merits of Christ can save him ; then for him wilfully and maliciously to oppose him and the work of his Spirit, and will not be beholden to him for salvation, now for such a one to be forgiven, is utterly impossible.

Object. But why is it possible, nothing is impossible with God?

Ans. A man through ignorance may deny. Christ, and maliciously fall from the profession of the truth into all wickedness, as did St. Paul, and the Jews that crucified Christ, and yet not falling against light and knowledge,

knowledge, there is room for the Holy Ghost to work upon him to enlighten him, and to convince him of his folly and so make way for conversion. And besides, a man after he hath been enlightened, and yet falls back through infirmity and weakness of flesh, as Peter did, and doth not fall wilfully and maliciously, then the Holy Ghost may work upon him and work in him a deep sorrow for abusing so much love and mercy, and so carry on his good work unto salvation. But a man when he is once enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and has some taste of God's love and favour, and some foretaste of the Joys of heaven; and then at last utterly opposing this illuminating work of the spirit, and wilfully and maliciously to fall away and so to reject the spirit's renewed work, alas! then the Holy Ghost has done, he has nothing more that he can work in him, for this wretched creature, has utterly rejected him, his enlightened work, his convincing work, his sanctifying work he hath utterly rejected Christ's pardon, heaven and all. Now, this poor wretch is past all hopes of mercy, all hopes of pardon, nay, for such a one we are forbidden to pray, as we see in the text, wherein my text is a part. Now Christ prayed for them who maliciously crucified him Luke xxiii. 34. saying, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do. Alas! they knew not what they were doing, for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory, 1 Cor. ii. 8. But if they had known, and yet crucified him, Christ would not have spent his breath to pray for them; for when a man has committed this unpardonable sin, neither the prayers in heaven or on earth can do him any good; for as the text saith, *There is a sin unto Death.*

I shall conclude with a few words of application.

1. Watch very diligently against all sin but above all take special heed of those sins that come near to the sin against the Holy Ghost, and they are these, hypocrisy,

poorly, taking the outward profession of religion, and so dissembling and mocking of God, sinning wilfully against conviction of conscience, and against great light and knowledge, sinning presumptuously and with an high hand: these sins tho' none of them are the direct sin against the Holy Ghost, yet they will come very near to it: therefore take special heed of them lest they through time should bring you to the committing this unpardonable sin. And,

2. Labour to be sincere in religion: And, by a true faith, ingraft yourselves into Christ. for they that be with Christ, can never commit this unpardonable sin; for, know this, amongst all the sins committed by fallen mankind, there is one sin that is a sin unto Death, which is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; which, whosoever commits it hath no forgiveness; neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

I desire you to take your Bibles, and search the places of scripture here cited, and the Lord give you understanding in all these things.

F I N I S.

